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While the political dimensions of the four-month-old Qatar crisis have been analyzed at length - and largely echo those of the Council's 2014 rift - there has been less scrutiny of the row's social impact. The social ramifications mirror the ongoing political strife, yet are likely to outlast the crisis, and thus dim the prospects for any resolution. Furthermore, because this clash is so remarkably public, it has become nearly impossible for nationals not to take sides. During past Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) clashes, the ultimate unity of the Gulf states has been highlighted thanks to family, tribal, religious, and historical ties. Yet amid the current crisis, political intransigence has underscored the social differences, particularly national identities.

Surge of Creative Nationalism

The outpouring of nationalist sentiment in the Gulf certainly predates the current crisis, yet has been highlighted recently because of it. Indeed, in a June 2016 report, Kristin Smith Diwan, a senior resident scholar at the Arab Gulf States Institute in Washington, identified a *"new nationalism"* in the Gulf, which *"reflects the decline of the power of the welfare state to engender gratitude and loyalty" while also demonstrating "the elevated demands by and on citizens."* Certainly, with the passage of conscription laws in Kuwait, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), the introduction of greater austerity measures in the form of subsidy reductions, and the institution of VAT in 2018, the ruling bargain in the Gulf is changing. Nonetheless, the sense of national pride has strengthened, an outcome not predicted by rentier state theory. Although this nationalism initially seemed to reflect a sense of military pride and support for the Yemen war, enhanced by state-led efforts to host national events, it has morphed into a more grassroots expression of national commitment. The ongoing crisis and blockade have led to an unprecedented outpouring of nationalist support at the grassroots level.

While in the past, the state has introduced nationalist creative enterprises, for example through National Day celebrations, today they seem to be emerging more organically. GCC nationals are using both traditional and social media, from songs to cartoons, to express their support for their respective national leaders. The most noteworthy, a drawing of Tamim al-Majd by Qatari artist Ahmed bin Majed Almaadheed has gone viral in Qatar. In fact, many are using the drawing as an avatar for social media

accounts, demonstrating their support for Emir Tamim. This image has become a springboard for similar political cartoons and drawings elsewhere.

Music has also been used to demonstrate national pride. The locally recorded *"One Nation"* (an anthem *"in solidarity with Qatar"*) was released in June and involved both local and international musicians. Its lyrics highlight Qatar's strength and ends with the following lines: *"We stand tall, above it all. Rain will fall, to plant the seeds that feed us all. We stand united, behind our leader with all our might. With you we rise, our nation's pride."* Not to be outdone, Saudi label Rotana released a *"diss track"* entitled *"Inform Qatar in September"*. Songwriter Turki al-Sheikh, an advisor to the Saudi Royal Court, wrote the song, which was performed by seven famous Arab singers, including Saudis Abdul Majeed Abdullah and Mohammed Abdu. Rotana is owned primarily by Prince al-Waleed bin Talal of the ruling family. The song's lyrics praise Saudi Arabia as *"the epitome of might and enshrinement,"* while accusing Qatar of *"twenty years of scheming, treachery, and conspiracy"*.

Traditional nabati poetry of the Arabian Peninsula has also become prominent in the Qatar crisis. In June Dubai ruler Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashed al-Maktoum published a poem entitled *"The Clear Path"* on his Instagram account. In it, he urges Qatar to return to the fold of its former GCC allies: *"Of one origin, people, existence / one flesh and blood, one land and faith […] Yet Qatar turns to the nearby stranger, to the weak."* As Andrew Leber notes, the tone of this latest poem differs greatly from that of Shaykh Mohammed bin Rashed's 2014 *"Promises"*, which was published in Qatari and Emirati papers. *"And I feel all the Gulf is one country, one land, / One wonderful Gulf, filled with honorable men. Descended from one line, the noblest men, / Nothing shall come between these purest of hearts."* Juxtaposing these two poems illustrates the acrimony that has developed during the second crisis, which apparently has informed citizens' creative endeavors as well. Indeed, former Million's Poet contestant Nasser al-Faraana posted a half-hour video on Qatar's foreign policy, ending with a poem that stated: *"By God, with you are the armies of the Christians, / Them and the apostates [Shi'ite] and the Jews are your friends."*

Vitriolic Media Coverage

Although one of the root causes of the crisis was the political nature of al-Jazeera's broadcasts, the crisis has had the effect of politicizing other media outlets. Because showing sympathy for Qatar has been criminalized in Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE, the only coverage in these states is necessarily one-sided. General lack of trust has led to a pitting of the two sides against each other, leaving little grey area. Evidence of this is the establishment of the website The Qatar Insider, funded by a Saudi lobbying group and launched in June, which led to the creation of the Qatari-funded Lift the Blockade website in September, largely meant to counter unsubstantiated claims made on the other site.

Allegations in the media about Qatar have become particularly outlandish. Abu Dhabi's ambassador to Russia claimed that Qatar had given al-Qaeda information about Emirati troop positions in Yemen; a Saudi daily claimed that Qatar conspired with Iran to delay the execution of cleric Nimr al-Nimr in Saudi Arabia by negotiating the release of Qatari hunters in Iraq; the Emirati daily Gulf News openly questioned the level and liquidity of Qatar's financial reserves; Sky News Arabia, co-owned by an Abu Dhabi company and the UK's Sky, released a documentary in July claiming to reveal Qatari involvement in the 9/11 attacks; and the Saudi daily Okaz claimed that the Qatar-owned London department store Harrods was collecting the credit card details of shoppers from the quartet countries.

Meanwhile, in Qatar, support for Sheikh Tamim has reached a fever pitch. There are some accusations that stories published by local media are downplaying the actual impact of the blockade while overstating support for Qatar abroad. This lack of nonbiased media in the region, though not an entirely new issue, mirrors ongoing debates in the United States about *"fake news"* and the responsibility of news outlets to their readership, as well as to the political leadership.

Further complicating the ability to find real news is the involvement of public relations firms in the blockade. The Financial Times announced in September Saudi Arabia's plans to establish public relations hubs in London, Berlin, Paris, and Moscow this fall, with potential expansion to Beijing, Tokyo, and Mumbai. These hubs would disseminate press releases, published over social media, that invite *"social influencers"* for publicized visits to the kingdom, all in an effort to *"distribute the Saudi perspective on global developments in response to negative/inaccurate publications about the kingdom."* They would also promote Saudi culture.

Attempts to Breed Factionalism in Al Thani Family

Perhaps most shocking has been the outright attempts to present alternative rule to Qatar. The Emirati and Egyptian press first presented Sheikh Saud bin Nasser Al Thani as *"Qatar's leading opposition figure".* The Egyptian press later touted Sheikh Tamim's uncle Sheikh Abdulaziz bin Khalifa, a former energy minister living in Geneva, as a potential opposition leader. Now, Sheikh Abdullah bin Ali, with the support of London-based Qatari businessman Khalid al-Hail, seems to be the primary voice of the so-called Qatari opposition, with al-Hail helping to organize an opposition conference in London on September 14. Paris-based Sheikh Sultan bin Suhaim Al Thani has also appeared publicly, supporting Sheikh Abdullah's calls to end the crisis through a Qatari national meeting, and criticizing his country's position in the crisis and its past foreign policies.

While the Al Thani family has been notoriously fractious in the past - two consecutive coups took place in 1972 and 1995 - it is unprecedented for outside countries to comment on domestic political arrangements, particularly on issues of succession. Moves toward encouraging regime change in Qatar will likely only heighten the nationalistic fervor already afoot and strengthen support for Emir Tamim. Furthermore, by linking the crisis to Qatar's monarch personally, and even to his father, Sheikh Hamad, the anti-Qatar quartet make compromise and trust with that leader nearly impossible.

Problematic Family/Tribal ties

Another major social component of the blockade is the difficulty for families to cross borders. As elsewhere in the Middle East, tribal ties overlap national borders, meaning that members of the same tribe or even the same family, despite the physical proximity, often live in different countries. The livelihoods and educations of those Qataris living in Bahrain, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE, as well as nationals of those countries living in Qatar, are constrained. On June 19, authorities in Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE forced Qatari nationals to leave those countries, and since June 5 they have denied Qataris entry into those states.

Aside from the obvious economic cost, the social problems resulting from the policy have led Qatari citizens to feel targeted. Sheikh Saif bin Ahmed Al Thani has accused the quartet of having *"allowed politics to disrupt the social fabric of our union."* Qatar's National Human Rights Committee estimates that more than 13,000 people are affected by the blockade, including at least 6,500 mixed families. The governments of Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE have publicly acknowledged the negative effects of the blockade on mixed families and have established emergency hotlines, yet the scale of the problem makes it difficult to ensure that all can be helped. Of 12 Gulf nationals known by Human Rights Watch to have contacted the line, only two gained permission to travel back and forth, while the other 50 interviewed were scared to call and reveal their identities because they were living in Qatar.There have been no known exceptions regarding medical treatment or education.

Not only have GCC nationals come under such restrictions, Egyptians who remain in Qatar do not have access to an embassy, making it difficult for them to renew their passports and, consequently, their Qatari residency permits. Migrant workers have also felt the impact of the blockade. Saudi Arabia formerly allowed Qataris to bring expatriate workers there for three months for a fee; some of these workers have thus been stranded without proper documentation or salary. The increase in food prices in Qatar due to the blockade has affected migrant workers with low salaries the most.

Claims of Harassment

Vitriol from leaderships of the countries involved in the blockade has possibly led to conflict on the ground. The New Arab reported claims in September from UK-based human rights lawyer Rodney Dixon QC that three Qatari officials were allegedly imprisoned, beaten, and tortured while visiting the UAE. Meanwhile, Gulf News reported that rights groups in Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE have condemned the *"flagrant violation of human rights"* of Qatari Hamad Abdul Hadi al-Merri, who was reportedly assaulted by employees from Qatar's interior ministry and arrested upon his return from haj.

A Space for Islamists and Islam

Two questions that underlie the issue of Qatar's support for terrorism are: what exactly defines a terrorist, and what type of Islam is deemed politically acceptable within the Gulf? For instance, Sheikh Yusuf al-Qaradawi, though associated with the Muslim Brotherhood in the past, has supporters who are not members of that movement. His sermons and his television programs, when they were broadcast, would hardly have converted anyone to the Brotherhood.

The blockading countries' conflation of Brotherhood figures with violent Islamists has proven dangerous and has granted these

governments a security excuse for a crackdown on nonviolent Islamists. This anti-Islamist attitude is not new. As early as 2009, a Wikileaks document revealed that *"[b]eing labelled a Muslim Brother is about the worst epithet possible in MBZ's [Abu Dhabi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Zayed] vocabulary."* In countries that have historically supported a conservative interpretation of Islam, restriction on, and inherent suspicion of, Islamists are unsustainable, at least without some degree of opposition to such policies. This was evidenced by the September arrest of some 30 independent figures, including prominent clerics, in Saudi Arabia, as an attempt to consolidate political power and sideline potential rivals. Interestingly, shortly after this crackdown, King Salman issued a royal decree allowing women to drive – an unforeseen major social change that is likely linked to Saudi attempts both to modernize the kingdom and to win the ongoing PR war in the crisis.

Where Now?

All of these social effects make the current crisis increasingly difficult to resolve. While in the past ruling families have primarily ironed out differences behind closed doors, today accusations are traded publicly, and the repercussions of domestic and foreign policies fall on national citizens. The crisis has become not just about élite politics but has affected grassroots sentiments and galvanized national identities in states that are relatively newly independent.

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